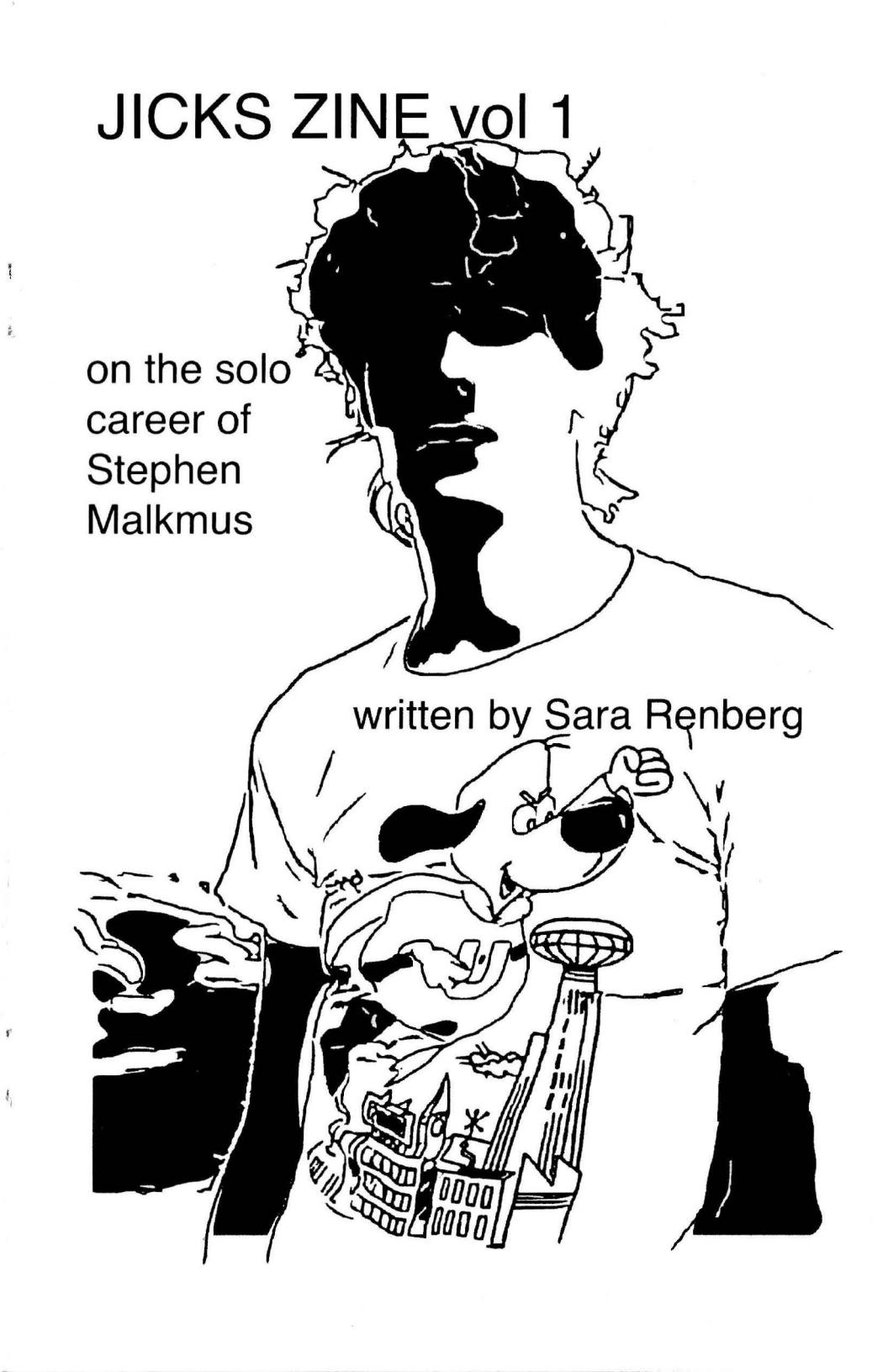


# JICKS ZINE vol 1

on the solo  
career of  
Stephen  
Malkmus



written by Sara Renberg



## **JICKS ZINE VOLUME 1 by Sara Renberg**

I grew up in rural southwestern Michigan and at the time we were not well connected to indie culture. It wasn't until I went to college that a friend of mine-- a real older brother type-- turned me onto Silver Jews and then to Pavement. My mind appropriately blown, I started to slowly work my way through the catalog. At the time I belonged to this music subscription service called eMusic which maybe is still around but I never hear about anyone using it anymore. Basically you paid like, \$20 a month or something and you could download a certain number of records. My memory is fuzzy. I told my friend I was thinking of getting Stephen Malkmus's solo record. "Oh no," said my friend, "Don't get that one. I hear it's really bad." But because I had a real younger sibling chip on my shoulder, and being contrary was one of my favorite things, I decided to get the record anyway.

It was a weird summer. I had just graduated. I was subletting from a friend because I did not have enough money for a security deposit, even though I had just started a "real job" in the city. In theory, I had roommates, but in practice, neither of them were there all summer. I slept in a long, skinny sunroom, wide enough for a twin bed and a small walkway. I ate angel hair pasta with cheese and green peppers every night, and I listened to Stephen Malkmus, and in many ways, that record was my roommate.

A lot of people come to Stephen Malkmus's solo career with the posture of: "I love Pavement Very Much, but this does not sound like Pavement, therefore I am disappointed and I am going to write this off entirely." Constantly there are reviews of his new records that say something like, "Finally, Stephen Malkmus is writing songs that people want to listen to again!" or "Finally, he is back in form on this one particular song!" but in this way where it seems like they haven't been actually following what he's been up to at all.

Is his solo output flawless? No! Does he sometimes rely on some lyrical shortcuts that I find a little lazy? Yes! But there's also some transcendent, playful, moving songs, and I have had some of the best moments of my life at Stephen Malkmus & the Jicks concerts, and I feel like his solo work deserves to be assessed on its own merits.

Please enjoy!

## THE END OF PAVEMENT

In 1998, Stephen Malkmus recorded American Water with the Silver Jews. It was the first time he'd recorded with them since an attempt at a recording session in 1995, when David Berman stormed out of the studio and kicked Malkmus out of the band. But in the intervening years, the Silver Jews released the well-received "Natural Bridge," and tensions between Berman and Malkmus thawed.

The American Water sessions took four days. According to Berman, "I wanted to make a record that wasn't some terrible, big, painful experience. I wanted to make records like other people make records, where you're having fun when you're doing it." From all accounts, it was a fun, sloppy time, with apparently plenty of alcohol and "a lot of drugs." But the performances on the record aren't sloppy at all-- from the precision of Tim Barnes' drumming, to Mike Fellow's rangy bass, and most notably, Malkmus's lead guitar, which unfurls into long, soulful lines. It is a beautiful record.

Malkmus was not having a fun time in Pavement. Their fifth record, Terror Twilight, was a slog to record, taking over six months and \$100,000. The tour itself was a disaster, and at their final show, he hung a pair of handcuffs on his mic stand and said, "These symbolize what it's like being in a band all these years."

Around the same time, Malkmus moved to Portland. Why Portland? "I don't know. I'm from the West Coast, as you know. I lived in New York. All I had was a futon and some paperback books and whatever clothes I had amassed. And free CDs from Matador. I was working pretty hard those first six years,

and was just having fun being a 20-something. But then my parents— they live in Idaho —they were like, ‘We don’t have room for your stuff. Come get it.’

“So I drove across the country in this Acura Legend I inherited from my grandmother. Loaded it up with what I had, and thought, I’m just going to go to Portland. I didn’t know anybody. I played some shows here (with Pavement). They were cool. I liked the bookstore Powell’s, and uh, that’s all I really knew. I guess. I liked the coffee and the rain. That’s novel to like, a Los Angeles person, to have this kind of industrial-looking, bricky, rainy, black coffee and cloudy skies and pine trees town. I didn’t expect to stay here that long.”

## (AND THE JICKS)

Stephen Malkmus's first record is officially credited only to Stephen Malkmus. He originally wanted it to be credited to his new band -- "Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks" -- but his label, Matador, convinced him not to. ("The label insisted we use my name to sell more records, and I was like, Ok, fine. But we're really the Jicks.") They also convinced him not to name the album "Swedish Reggae." (A great choice!) Nonetheless, the record is in fact a Jicks record.

### WHAT IS A JICK?

According to a very awkward interview on a Fox News program called "Red Eye" that aired at like 3 a.m., Malkmus says, "It's either a tick, or that robot you showed, or a mix between a jerk and a dick."

### WHO ARE THE JICKS?

The lineup of the Jicks changes over time, but here's who's on the first record:

John Moen-- drums, percussion, background vocals  
John moved to Portland in the mid '80s and has been involved with basically... every band since then. He played in The Dharma Bums, fronted the Maroons, played a Heatmiser tour and also an SNL appearance for Elliot Smith.... and played on the first three Jicks records until he joined the Decemberists.

Says John:

"When Steve Malkmus moved to town, we hung out at a couple parties, [...] [a]nd I said we should jam. Then Pavement broke up, and I was like, 'We should *really* jam.'"

### **Joanna Bolme-- bass, background vocals**

Joanna grew up in Portland. In the '90s she played in Calamity Jane, The Spinanes, etc. etc. According to a 2012 interview with Westword, she met Malkmus while she was working at Jackpot Recording Studios, and they became Scrabble friends.

Says Joanna:

"So one night, when he came over to play Scrabble and listen to records, he was like, "Hey, I've been playing with John, and we were just wondering if you wanted to come over and play bass. I know you're pretty good, and it would be fun." It was pretty casual, so I started jamming with those guys. It was really fun, and we all got along really well."

She also dated and was friends with Elliot Smith for a long time, and mixed his records Either/Or and From a Basement on the Hill.

### **Heather Larimer-- percussion, background vocals**

In a 2000 Thomas Beller piece, he refers to her as "Malkmus's girlfriend and kind-of-sort-of bandmate." And "Her voice appears on the record mostly in the forms of whoops and handclaps. The one intelligible word she pronounces is 'carcass.'" Please let the record show that I think the way she pronounces the word "carcass" is very cheery and charming.

## #1: BLACK BOOK

"Black Book" opens with some kind of pan flute / maraca combo. It's a very, "You're in a spooky forest," intro. I am not saying this is bad, but I am saying this is a choice! It's the first song on a first record, and "spooky forest" is where we begin.

After a few seconds, several guitars chime in-- one acoustic, and two electric with various degrees of overdrive, to my ears, and then, the singer begins, "Offer your trust to a friend who is not what he says." With Malkmus, it's often very unclear which lyrics you should take seriously or take meaning from, and I assume if asked, he would probably offer a shrug. And while he often claims that lyrics are not that important, or that they are just a skeleton for a song to hang on, I think this obscures the fact that he makes active choices about what the lyrics are.

"Offer your trust to a friend who is not what he says." The singer is speaking to an other who is about to be betrayed, who is conned into bad deeds through friendship. Over the course of the song, it is revealed that that singer is also a betrayer (though not necessarily the person who betrayed the original 'other'). The chorus posits a black book as some sort of magical talisman as opposed to a mundane collection of phone numbers.

The song ends with another flute/maraca/guitar spooky forest outro.

I have been puzzled by this song for a long time. Why is it first? What is it doing? It's very different in tone than the rest of the record, so.... why? One thing that I find interesting,

production-wise, is that Malkmus's voice isn't as up front in the mix as on much of the rest of the record, and isn't as clean. (I'm not saying it's necessarily "distorted," but it's not as "present.").

"Offer your trust to a friend who is not what he says," could be read as Malkmus asking us, the listener, to put aside our expectations and listen (and be prepared for disappointment). Or it could be trying to convey to the listeners that there are going to be characters on this record, to not get caught up in narrative truth. Or it could honestly just be fun to start your record with an imperative.

Or maybe the "spooky forest" has been the key all along. We're in unknown territory. Shit might get weird.

## #2: PHANTASIES

Before I moved to Portland I never really thought about Alaska's relationship to the Pacific Northwest. I just thought, "It's far away! It's its own thing." It is definitely far away, but it is less far away from Oregon and Washington than any other parts of the US. I was not prepared for the amount of Alaskans who would enter my life-- people who had moved to Portland for school, or people who lived part of the year in Portland, and the rest of the year worked on commercial fishing boats in Alaska. Alaska began to feel closer in my own internal geography, and to occupy more of my imagination.

Phantasies is a song that takes place in a fictional town in Alaska, where it is very cold, and people dream of moving to Florida. The opening melody is doubled by keys that have a vibraphone texture to them (maybe a Rhodes?), and periodically there are sounds of-- performative stretching, whooping, claves, and also just like... standard sound effects on keyboards? Like, for example, my students are always obsessed with this button on the keyboard, that if you press it, there's the sound of a man yelling, "DJ!!" in this clipped, brusque way. I am willing to be wrong!!! But it at least has the energy of someone going, "what are all the weird sounds I can make, and how can I fit them into a pop song."

The chorus has a cheerful "Whoa-oo-oah," backing vocal section, as well as handclaps, and then leads into this bottom-dropping syrupy reverbed post-chorus, and then has a plaintive outro of keys and lead guitar.

I think the most important part of this song is that you can HEAR Malkmus having fun making it. He's having a good

time! And it's fun to listen to, and fun to sing along with. It also, I think, establishes a lot of elements that are common within Jicks songs-- the textural differences between parts of the songs, backing vocals, and guitar lines that have a chance to stretch out a little.

**FUN FACT:** Somehow, this song was used in a 2005 Sears 13-Hour-Sale commercial.

### #3: JO JO'S JACKET

Jo Jo's Jacket is, in my opinion, one of the key songs on this album. It opens with a clip of Yul Brynner saying the following:

"And in a funny way, the shaving of my, uh, head has been a liberation from, uh, a lot of, uh, stupid vanities really. Uh, it has simplified everything for me, it has opened a lot of doors maybe."

Part of the reality of Pavement was that they were notoriously sloppy and inconsistent live, and some of the constraints of that sloppiness led to some inventive songwriting. But as someone who has worked with drummers who have a tentative grasp on tempos, and then moved on to working with better musicians-- I can't fully describe to you the amount of relief I felt when that happened. I no longer felt like I had to hold everything together from the front. A set no longer felt like hard work. I loosened up, and actually felt like I was playing.

It's not that radical to suggest that the Jicks are really good musicians, and they support in a way that allows Malkmus to not have to carry a song. In the midst of Jo Jo's Jacket there is a great guitar solo, and he's able to trust that things will stay together live.

And this feeling of liberation permeates the entire song. The chorus is literally, "Weee!!! Wooo!!!!" The entire first verse he pretends to be Yul Brynner: "I'm not what you think I am / I'm the king of Siam." He plays with the actor and the identification of the actor with his roles, which is witty but also... silly and joyful.

The second verse has: “Stay inside on Christmas Day/ and make believe that you are my candy cane” which I’ve always found to have a real, lived-in sexiness to it. Maybe not accidentally, this is the song with the most audible contributions of Heather Larimer.

Another thing I feel like is audible here is the liberation of no longer being *in Pavement*, the relief from whatever it meant to be in that particular band. The end of the song, ironically, has the most Pavement vibe to it, with Malkmus talk-singing:

“Bob Dylan sang in ‘It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)’: ‘Everything from toy guns that spark to flesh colored Christs that glow in the dark It’s easy to see we got in too far and not much is really sacred’”

Which is *almost* a direct quote from that Bob Dylan song, with this minor discrepancy:

“It’s easy to see without looking too far  
That not much is really sacred”

And I feel like that change -- to “It’s easy to see we got in too far”-- is a gentle mea culpa.

#### **#4: CHURCH ON WHITE**

Robert Bingham was a novelist who was born into an immensely wealthy/cursed Kentuckian newspaper family. He helped start the literary magazine Open City and its publishing arm, Open City Books, which put out David Berman's book of poetry, Actual Air. David Berman said, "[H]anging out with Rob was one of the funnest times in my life. He was hilarious and headstrong and extravagant in his ways." He was also chaotic and a serious alcoholic (along with other drug use). Bingham started out as a fan of Pavement, and then over time became a friend. Malkmus stayed with him whenever he was in New York; Bingham hung out with them during the recording sessions for Terror Twilight; Pavement played at Bingham's wedding. There's a scene in the Slow Century documentary where Malkmus is looking at a notebook that he had used for writing lyrics, and then finds some handwriting that isn't his--and then, delightedly, realizes it belongs to Bingham.

In 1999, Bingham died of an accidental heroin overdose, and Malkmus was an usher at his funeral. Thomas Beller, a co-editor of Open City, said at the memorial service:

"It was always such a struggle for Robbie, but it was exhilarating to be around that struggle. It was perplexing, but it was also somehow inspiring, because I always felt that part of what he was wrestling with was the truth, the truth about people and society and himself."

In 2000, Beller went to Portland to interview Malkmus for Spin Magazine. It was a post-Pavement, pre-solo release interview. In it, Beller writes:

"When we got to his place we just sat in the car and he played me a rough mix of the new record. One song stood out—it was the most unabashedly emotive song I'd heard from him, and as it went on it became clear it was about Rob. 'All you ever wanted/was everything/ and everything/ plus the truth/ I only poured you/ half a life.'

"It's called Church on White, a pun on Bingham's address, Church and White Street. It ends with a brooding lead that spirals upward into a pretty wild emotional pitch before trailing to a shrugging end. He chuckled a little at the end of it. 'Such an emotional lead,' he said, as though he didn't know what came over him."

Church on White is the other key to this record. The other aspect of no longer writing songs with Pavement is the freedom to write something intimate, and personal, and direct. It's a song about feeling. There is no need to intellectualize how sad he is to have lost his friend; he just gets to express it.

## #5: THE HOOK

Following the emotional climax of the album is a straight-ahead story song about being kidnapped by Turkish pirates and then, in time, also becoming a pirate. It's three verses, no choruses, with a guitar solo in between verses 2 and 3. There's some fun percussion (cowbell, some kind of percussion scraper, like a güiro) but overall, there's nothing formally *surprising* about this song, except that it's actually surprising to see Malkmus engaging directly with a traditional form, without trying to scramble it or come at it slantways.

Pirates and sailors have long been figures of identification for musicians, with the obvious parallels of itinerant lifestyles and being adjacent to "normal" society. Jimmy Buffett, notably, hit upon this theme in the 1970s, before leaning into and subsequently calcifying into his island escapism motif. But the identification with a pirate does offer the opportunity for some real pathos.

In the first verse of The Hook, the singer explains he was kidnapped at 19 by pirates, tortured ( / hazed?) and that he never saw his family again. It's a bouncy song with moments of deep sadness! By the third verse, our singer has risen in the ranks as a pirate:

"By 31, I was the Captain of a galleon  
I was Poseidon's new son  
The coast of Montenegro was my favorite target  
It was ever so fun"

Which is impish and playful, but the rest of the verse spends its time dismissing various quirky aspects of the pirate myth and ends with "We were killers with the cold eyes of a sailor."

I don't think this song neatly fits into the "repentant villain" song type, because I don't think this protagonist is necessarily repentant OR unrepentant. I think this protagonist's message is actually, "I'm not what you think I am," which, of course, is a familiar message on this record.

## #6: DISCRETION GROVE

Discretion Grove had its beginnings in the Pavement era -- you can hear an embryonic version of it being rehearsed in the Slow Century documentary -- though it clearly evolved along the way. This version, like most of the other songs on this record, has a much sunnier disposition than anything on Terror Twilight. In very Pavement form, there's an unrelated, low-key fragment at the beginning of the song that quickly fades out, and then the song kicks off in earnest. The instrumentation on this song is pretty classic - two guitars, bass, drums. The two guitars play off each other well-- sometimes they're in unison power chords, sometimes in call and response. Towards the end of the song they play in harmonic lines, building to what feels like a satisfying conclusion... and then there's a surprise coda, which I manage to forget about and be delighted by, every time.

Some lyrics I love from this song:

“Hate recreated / A revelation”

“I felt up your feelings”

“I’m trying to get up from sending all my selves to you”

One thing about Malkmus’s lyrics being sometimes difficult to decipher is that, as the decipherer, you have a lot of power! You can pick which lyrical option you like best, or you can enjoy an array of conflicting possibilities.

In the middle of the second verse, I have literally no idea what he’s saying. The one I have found most convincing, though least sensical, is “And in times I tell to June” but I have seen other people insist that it is “And in times I tilted you” or “And in times I tilted truth.” I like all of them!

There's another line that's repeated at the end of the song-- "Just crash on wind on a manic bay" is what a lot of people seem to think it is, but it also sounds a lot like saying "Discretion wind on a manic bay" but saying Discretion like you're Sean Connery. I think *probably* the lyric is the former, and he is playing with how "Just crash on" kind of rhymes with "Discretion," but I personally think it's more fun to do a Sean Connery impression while singing, so that's what I do.

There is a third option available to you when presented with lyrics, and that is to willfully misunderstand. In the first verse, he sings, "Specialized victories / for overage whores." I know that it was popular throughout the '90s and early aughts to use the word whore for fun/shock, but I don't find it that interesting. I prefer to hear this line as "Specialized victories / for an overage horse." I absolutely know this is not the lyric and I do not care. I VERY much like imagining old horses trotting around, competing at extremely easy tasks (carrot eating contest; walk around puddles; naps graded by length and style).

## #7: TROUBBBLE

Clocking in at a scant 1:41, Troubbble is all killer, no filler. There's a bouncy recurring keys riff. There's some tight internal rhyming:

“The world passes by in a flash  
From the birth of the earth to the curse  
Of your desperate math”

The buildup of birth/earth/curse then tying back to the previous line with “math” offers a perfect release.

This is only a two verse song. The end of the first chorus proclaims, “We spell trouble,” but by the end of the second chorus, it’s subverted: “We spell trouble ‘T-r-o-u-b-b-l-e!’”

It's a catchy, tongue-in-cheek, and perfectly crafted power pop.

## #8: PINK INDIA

Pink India is a harbinger of things to come: a folky jam that somehow morphs into a more driving rock song and then loosens back to the original folky theme at the end. It is six minutes long and it does not feel like six minutes long. The shifts in dynamic, instrumentation, and texture keep it new.

This is certainly not the jammiest song in the Jicks's catalog, but I think it's the first that hints at Malkmus's interest in it. A top complaint that I hear from non-Jicks fans is that they don't like the jammy songs, and I definitely recognize that it's not everyone's taste! But I personally never find the jams to be unfocused or overindulgent, and I find a lot to love in how they evolve.

The lyrics of the song are about Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary of India in the late 1800s, and his role in the so-called "Great Game" between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan... and it's also about masculinity and colonization! Durand is doing his part in this empire expansion as he is "determined to be a man," but that very act also alienates him from the world around him (and, I might argue, alienates him from his own self). There's a lot of preoccupation with identity on this record (Who am I? / I'm not who you think) but this is the first song that articulates it in this way (What kind of man am I? / What kind of man do I want to be?).

Some moments in this song that always crack me up are, "I had a crap gin and tonic / it wounded me" and "Soon he was singing a different tune / it went something just like this:" followed by an instrumental passage. I love this move, every time.

## #9: TROJAN CURFEW

Trojan Curfew is a melancholy, stately song that shares a lot of vibes with the Procol Harum classic “Whiter Shade of Pale.”

There’s the use of mythology to create a mood, some background keyboard lines with a Bach vibe, and the last chorus has the lyrics: “Aren’t you too pale? Does it hurt you?” which makes the reference feel intentional to me.

The song toggles between the Greek gods during the Trojan War and a present day narrator getting smashed at the Swedish Midsommer party on the Greek island of Ios. The first verse emphasizes the insignificance of humans -- “Greek gods are communing beneath a doric arch / and they talk how small we humans are” and the second verse would seem to confirm-- to go from a mythological war to just a raucous party. But the party also seems to be connected to this earlier time-- not just in location (the doric arch reappears here) but a drunk Scandi has a “slurred medieval accent.” This suggestion of time slippage elevates the gathering to something beyond its literal circumstances.

## #10: VAGUE SPACE

This song opens with a trade off between keys and a wah-wah guitar, in a deceptively mellow way, but the song quickly picks up. I've always understood this song to be about the moment where you're trying to define a relationship-- you're not in love, but, are you going to keep seeing other people? What are you to each other? Is this going somewhere? "Do you want to know where it stands right now?" is the first line, but the chorus is, "I love to tear you off" -- which is sung in falsetto, but in a really sweet way. There does seem to be a tension where the other is maybe more invested in a serious relationship than the narrator, but there's also "a moment I could learn to love / the salutations to the levels above." There's uncertainty but there's also possibility.

There are a couple live versions of this song from 2001 which are just solo acoustic guitar and Malkmus and I recommend seeking them out. There's one from a SPIN magazine session, and another from a KCRW session, and the way his voice opens up on the chorus (particularly in the SPIN session) sounds so unguarded and beautiful.

## #11: JENNY & THE ESS-DOG

Jenny & The Ess-Dog is like an /r/relationships post: “I (18F) have been dating my boyfriend (31M) for a year, but I’m worried we’re growing apart?” And like any good reddit post, you spend the whole time saying, “Oh, no, honey. No no no. Break up with him.” Jenny and The Ess-Dog (Sean, if you wish!) have a large age gap in their relationship, but a similar amount of maturity... until she goes to college and outgrows him. The song is a real romp, and we get our happy ending (they do break up! She starts pre-law!), though I think we are allowed to at least feel a little sad for the Ess-Dog, who has had to sell his guitar.

There are some people who think this song is somehow about Malkmus and Heather Larimer, but Heather was 28 and Malkmus 34, so I don’t really buy it as a literal autobiographical correlation here. I think this is exploring some kind of anxiety of What kind of man am i? How do I not become this guy? Am I going to be washed-up / forgotten / left behind?

## #12: DEADO

In 2018, Malkmus sat down with Rolling Stone for an edition of “My Life in 15 Songs.” 10 of the songs are from Pavement; 5 of the songs are from the Jicks era. Perplexingly, the one song he included from this album was Deado. I have nothing against this song-- I think the melody on the verses is sprightly and syncopated, and the chorus is reverby and lush and longing. It’s a nice way to end the record, but it’s not one of the standouts. Here is what he has to say about the song:

“That was the end of the music business, as I see it, around 2001. There was the Internet, and passing a torch maybe to younger artists like the Strokes and the White Stripes. It wasn’t my torch to pass. But all of a sudden it was a new century, and I was continuing on the struggle.”

The song supports this thesis -- of being unable to keep up with new “tactics,” talking about “chasing performance.” But the song also seems to have acceptance for no longer having the torch, and being grateful to have ever had it: “Jen, you took me far into the long line / divine divine divine divine.” And maybe that’s why Malkmus chose this song to sum up this first album-- it’s most clearly about the transition he went through in his career.

## RECEPTION & PERCEPTION

At its release, *Stephen Malkmus* received lukewarm-to-positive ratings -- it's metacritic score is an 82! But somehow in the six years in between its release and when I first got my ears on it, its reputation was "it's not that good." I'm interested in how this occurred! A couple of one star reviews on Amazon provide some theories.

From Amazon user Robert Hanks, titled, "What a Mishmash of Junk!":

"As much as I loved Terror Twilight, this solo outing by Mr. Malkmus is truly hideous. I didn't realize how important the band Pavement, as a unit would be until I bought this in good faith. I can overlook that he can't sing, but the songs, good god! The cuts lurch uncertainly from quasi-reggae to synth pop, and everything in between. Truly terrible, and I hope to see greater things from Malkmus with a re-formed Pavement!"

This is, of course, the "it's not Pavement" theory.

Another theory, from user paloma:

"If you like the direction Pavement went with BTC and TT then you'll like this album. In my opinion Pave created one of the greatest albums ever recorded with WZ then crashed. SM's solo effort wallows in the wreckage. The album is boring musically and the lyrics are just dumb. Don't believe all the critical praise heaped on this record. It is not innovative, clever or interesting. It is bland crap bordering on pretentious garbage. I gave it one star because Amazon won't let me give it zero."

For certain Pavement fans, Pavement had *already* been bad at the time of their breakup. Some fans think the band sold out after their first record; some think only the first two records are classic and that everything after that is dreck; some think only the last record is bad. From that perspective, saying “early Pavement is good, late Pavement is bad, and thus Stephen Malkmus’s solo career is also bad” is a coherent worldview.

For me, since I came to the party long after Pavement had broken up, I had no lingering feelings of angst about the breakup, and I had no feelings of betrayal or disappointment about their creative decisions album to album. I had not experienced any of these events in real time-- they had already happened.

Additionally, I discovered this record at a transitional time in my life. After being out for four years, I had finally shed enough Catholicism to start dating girls. I was attempting to launch myself into the “real world” without the same safety net as my peers. The new phase of my life had not yet started, but I was terrified that it would warp me into a person without empathy or interests. What kind of person was I? How much control did I have over who I would become? The themes of this record were obviously resonant to me, and I’m grateful I encountered it when I did.

I’ve really enjoyed diving into this record so deeply in these strange times, and I hope you’ve enjoyed this journey with me. Thank you for reading. Expect volume 2 in early 2022!

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## **BIO**

Sara Renberg is a writer and musician based in Pittsburgh, PA. Her poems have appeared in such places as Wax Nine, Reality Beach, and Poor Claudia Phenome. Her latest record, Butch Spring, will be released on Antiquated Future Records on March 5, 2021. She can be found at [sararenberg.com](http://sararenberg.com) or on twitter @dykings.

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